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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 DJIBOUTI 000919

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SUBJECT: SOMALIA: TFG FOREIGN MINISTER COMMENTS ON MILITARY AND  
DIPLOMATIC EFFORTS TO COMBAT AL-SHABAAB

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Embassy, Djibouti; REASON: 1.4(A), (B), (D)

11. (C) SUMMARY. Djibouti's ongoing effort to train nearly 500 troops for Somalia's Transitional Federal Government (TFG) is "critical" for achieving the TFG's aim of training up to 3,000 recruits to form a new Somali army, according to Somali TFG Foreign Minister Mohamed Abdullahi Omaar, who hopes to have additional tranches of troops arriving every two months. Force generation (possibly by recruiting from Puntland and Somaliland) and forming an officer corps from the Somali diaspora are other objectives for the TFG military. Omaar, who is from Hargeisa, also signaled interest in exploring closer TFG security cooperation with Somaliland and Puntland, even without first resolving their long-term political status. On the diplomatic front, a July 10 IGAD ministerial highlighted the need to strengthen the mandate for the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), while relaxing AMISOM's rules of engagement. TFG FM Omaar, Djiboutian FM Yousseuf, and Ugandan FM Kutesa plan to travel to New York to lobby the UNSC on these points, as well as on imposing sanctions on Eritrea for its support to terrorist al-Shabaab fighters. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) Ambassador and DCM met on July 12 with Somali TFG Foreign Minister Mohamed Abdullahi Omaar and Abdirahman Mohamed Hirabe, DCM of Somalia's Embassy in Djibouti. Earlier in the day, Emboffs and U.S. military personnel paid a separate visit to Djibouti's military school at Hol Hol, where the GODJ is training nearly 500 TFG troops (septel).

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TRAINING IN DJIBOUTI "CRITICAL" TO FORMATION OF SOMALI ARMY  
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13. (C) FM Omaar expressed appreciation for Djibouti's ongoing efforts to train nearly 500 TFG military recruits (approximately 466 had arrived since July 5), noting that recruits had begun to assemble in Mogadishu since May 2009. Formation of a national Somali army had been the TFG's objective since hard-liner Hassan Dahir Aweys had returned to Somalia on April 23. Training in Djibouti was therefore "critical" to the aim of training

2,000-3,000 troops; Omaar said he hoped additional tranches of recruits would arrive in Djibouti every two months for training. The "most difficult" objective of training was to instill a sense of discipline and order. Separately, some 575 TFG troops had graduated from nine months of training in Uganda.

14. (C) TFG forces could also draw on youth abandoning al-Shabaab. As 15- to 17-year-old youths were often "enticed into al-Shabaab" on a clan basis, many sought to cross over to the TFG. Several hundred had done so within the last few days, Omaar said, but the challenge was how to facilitate such forces doing so safely.

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CRITICAL NEED FOR OFFICERS AND HARDWARE  
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15. (C) A "critical gap" in the Somali national security forces was the absence of a professional officer corps, Omaar added. The TFG was therefore approaching some 10-20 former officers from the Siad Barre-era (army captains to colonels, i.e., 0-3 to 0-6 level, as general officers were too old) to have them return from East Africa and the UK for service in Somalia. Even these officers, however, had been out of service so long that they required refresher

DJIBOUTI 00000919 002 OF 003

training.

16. (C) The TFG sought to develop a military strategy that would allow TFG forces to cover an area larger than just Mogadishu's port and airport, Omaar said. He hailed July 12 military operations as successful, observing that AMISOM's recent deployment of tanks in Mogadishu had boosted the confidence of TFG troops, and had helped drive al-Shabaab fighters out of the Karan district. TFG ground forces were now conducting house-to-house searches for al-Shabaab fighters who had fled. (NOTE: We understand that the TFG may later have lost these gains. END NOTE.) Al-Shabaab could not take Mogadishu so long as AMISOM was present, Omaar added.

17. (C) On prospects for additional AMISOM forces, Omaar said Sierra Leone's foreign and defense ministers had asserted to him that one battalion from Sierra Leone was ready to deploy. Nigeria, on the other hand, was not ready. Omar said he was satisfied with Kenya's decision to have its forces advance toward Somalia to "close the border", but not enter Somalia.

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SOMALILAND MUST RECOGNIZE THREAT FROM AL-SHABAAB  
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18. (C) The TFG was examining recruiting troops from among unemployed youth in relatively stable regions of Somalia, specifically Puntland and Somaliland, Omaar said. While the remainder of Somalia was engaged in a critical struggle against al-Shabaab, these areas were "doing nothing." Recruitment would be done on "an individual basis," not through Somaliland government authorities.

¶9. (C) Citing the October 29, 2008, terrorist bombings in Hargeisa and Bosasso--which included the Somaliland presidential palace--FM Omaar observed that Somaliland could not "ignore the issue of the al-Shabaab." If al-Shabaab took over Mogadishu and Kismayo, then "Hargeisa would be the next target." Stabilizing Mogadishu was in the TFG and Somaliland's common interest; perhaps a "modus vivendi limited to the security sector" could be jointly established to address the threat posed by al-Shabaab.

¶10. (C) Omaar, himself originally from Hargeisa, noted that most TFG parliamentarians had spouses residing in Hargeisa; two key al-Shabaab leaders were also from Somaliland. Asked whether September 27 elections in Somaliland could present political obstacles for Somaliland engagement with the TFG, Omaar said he hoped all three Somaliland political parties could agree on the need to cooperate with the TFG against al-Shabaab.

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IGAD MINISTERS TO LOBBY THE UNSC  
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¶11. (C) On the diplomatic front, FM Omaar highlighted the aim of obtaining a more aggressive mandate, and more relaxed rules of engagement (ROE), for AMISOM. Omaar asserted that, on the margins of the July 1-3 African Union Summit in Sirte, AU Peace and

DJIBOUTI 00000919 003 OF 003

Security Commissioner Ramtane Lamamra had agreed to change AMISOM's ROE.

¶12. (C) Building on consensus within the AU's Peace and Security Council, the 33rd Extra-ordinary Session of the IGAD Council of Ministers had agreed on July 10 on an action plan to approach the UN Security Council. Omar said that Djiboutian Foreign Minister Mahmoud Ali Youssouf, Ugandan Foreign Minister Sam Kutesa, and himself would appear before the UNSC to advocate strengthening AMISOM's mandate, relaxing AMISOM's rules of engagement, allowing states bordering Somalia (i.e., Kenya and Djibouti) to contribute troops to AMISOM, and imposing sanctions against Eritrea for its support to al-Shabaab. Omaar characterized Djibouti as "absolutely committed" to supporting the TFG. Djibouti, Kenya, and Uganda all saw Somalia as "a regional issue"--not as simply a feud between two rival factions.

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ETHIOPIA WILL NOT SEND TROOPS TO SOMALIA  
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¶13. (C) Despite currently holding the IGAD presidency, Ethiopia "stood back" to allow others within IGAD to take the lead on Somalia: Ethiopia neither offered troops for AMISOM, nor planned to participate in the IGAD delegation to New York, Omaar said. Once the AMISOM mandate was changed to permit bordering countries to send troops, it would be "essential" for Ethiopia to publicly announce it did not intend to send troops to Somalia; the TFG would then acknowledge such a statement, Omaar said, noting that it was important to "exempt" both Ethiopia and Eritrea from Somalia. According to Omaar, at Sirte, Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles had told the TFG that he did not believe it necessary for the Ethiopian

military to enter Somalia.

¶14. (C) FM Omaar hailed the July 9 UNSC presidential statement (PRST) as "very positive," especially for its consideration of sanctions, and welcomed the U.S. PermRep's statement. It was essential to "shut off the tap" for Eritrea, Omaar said, adding that even "token measures" (such as a travel ban on Eritrean leadership) provided a significant psychological boost to forces fighting against al-Shabaab.

¶15. (C) COMMENT. Djibouti played a key role in Somali reconciliation, hosting UN-sponsored talks that culminated in power-sharing agreements and the election of Sheikh Sharif as TFG President. Recent events not only highlight the active steps that regional actors are taking to strengthen the TFG and AMISOM's capacity and mandate, but also the growing international consensus -- among IGAD members and within the African Union -- that Eritrea must be sanctioned for its support of FTO-designated al-Shabaab.

END COMMENT.

SWAN